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11/15/07

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1

PROG 11-15-84

AMB: FVORTIZ

POL: LKUSNITZ: JMR

DCM: JABUSHNELL, POL: RBHOWARD, POL: JJCARRAGHER

POL-3 AMB DCM, DAO ECON SCI, USIS MILGP RF, CHRON

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

SECSTATE WASHDC, PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PN

USCINCLANT NORFOLK VA

USAFSO HOWARD AFB PN//DOI-LAI//

CINCSO FOR INTAFF

CINCLANT ALSO FOR POLAD

ROME ALSO FOR EMBASSY VATICAN

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, AR

SUBJ: ARGENTINA'S CATHOLIC BISHOPS SUPPORT BEAGLE,

- DEMOCRACY, CRITICIZE SOME GOA POLICIES

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S2000000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release ☐ Excise ☐ Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full

☐ Classify as ☐ Extend as ☐ Downgrade to

Date ☐ Declassify on ☐ Reason

86 F93

Y6/293

DECLASSIFIED

1. [REDACTED] SUMMARY: THE 49TH ARGENTINE EPISCOPAL ASSEMBLY OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS MET FROM NOVEMBER 5-10. THE BISHOPS REITERATED THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE BEAGLE CHANNEL TREATY, BUT NOTED THAT CATHOLICS COULD VOTE THEIR CONSCIENCE ON THIS ISSUE IN THE NOVEMBER 25 PLEBISCITE. THE BISHOPS UNDERScoreD THE IMPORTANCE OF DEMOCRACY IN ARGENTINA, WHILE CRITICIZING SOME POLICIES OF THE ALFONSIN ADMINISTRATION, PARTICULARLY IN THE EDUCATIONAL AREA. JUST PRIOR TO THE BISHOPS' DELIBERATIONS, A LEFT-WING MAGAZINE PUBLISHED WHAT IT ALLEGED TO BE A GOVERNMENT LIST OF THOSE INVOLVED IN PAST HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. THE LIST INCLUDED OVER A DOZEN CHURCH FIGURES, MOST NOTABLY MONSIGNOR PIO LAGHI, EX-PAPAL NUNCIO IN ARGENTINA NOW SERVING IN WASHINGTON. GOVERNMENT SOURCES VIGORIOUSLY DENIED AUTHENTICITY OF THE LIST. THE BISHOPS AND OTHERS PARTICULARLY REPUDIATED LAGHI'S INCLUSION ON IT. THE GOVERNMENT QUICKLY AND PUBLICLY REJECTED THE BISHOPS' CRITICISM OF GOA EDUCATION POLICY. CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS MAY TURN AT LEAST TEMPORARILY MORE UNEASY AS A RESULT OF THE POST-ASSEMBLY COMMUNIQUE. END SUMMARY.

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2. (U) THE 49TH ARGENTINE EPISCOPAL ASSEMBLY OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS MET FROM NOVEMBER 5-10, LESS THAN A MONTH AFTER ARGENTINA'S EIGHTH NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS. THOUGH CONCENTRATING ON RELIGIOUS THEMES, THE BISHOPS' COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE ASSEMBLY ALSO COMMENTED ON THE BEAGLE CHANNEL TREATY, DOMESTIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, AND ACCUSATIONS OF CHURCH COMPLICITY DURING THE MILITARY REGIME "ANTI-SUBVERSIVE" STRUGGLE, AN ISSUE WHICH SURFACED REPEATEDLY OVER THE LAST YEAR.

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4

3. (U) A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, A LEFTIST WEEKLY MAGAZINE "EL PERIODISTA DE BUENOS AIRES (THE BUENOS AIRES JOURNALIST)" PUBLISHED A LIST OF 1,351 PERSONS SAID TO BE INVOLVED IN PAST HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. THIS "LIST OF REPRESSORS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER," ALLEGEDLY PREPARED BY THE GOVERNMENT-APPOINTED SABATO COMMISSION, INCLUDED THE NAME OF MONSIGNOR PIO LAGHI, WHO IS NOW SERVING AS PAPAL NUNCIO IN WASHINGTON, AS WELL AS MORE THAN A DOZEN OTHER RELIGIOUS FIGURES. THE EPISCOPAL ASSEMBLY QUICKLY RESPONDED, SENDING MONSIGNOR LAGHI A TELEGRAM EXPRESSING ITS SORROW THAT HIS NAME WAS UNJUSTLY INCLUDED AMONG HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATORS. FORMER NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PERSONS (CONADEP) MEMBERS ALSO DEFENDED MONSIGNOR LAGHI'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD, WHILE ADMITTING THAT ONE EX-DETAINEE SAID HE SAW THE PAPAL NUNCIO AT AN ILLEGAL DETENTION CAMP. LAGHI DENIED THIS, STATING HE WAS A HUMAN RIGHTS CHAMPION DURING HIS STAY IN ARGENTINA. ERNESTO SABATO, WHO HEADED CONADEP, SAID MONSIGNOR LAGHI "ACTED CORRECTLY IN ORDER TO SAVE PERSONS IN DANGER." SABATO, HOWEVER, WOULD NEITHER CONFIRM NOR DENY THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE LIST, SAYING MANY INNOCENT PERSONS WERE MENTIONED IN THE 50,000 PAGES OF EVIDENCE HIS COMMISSION COLLECTED.


SECRET

4. (U) SHORTLY AFTER THE LIST WAS PUBLISHED, THE INTERIOR MINISTRY STATED THAT THE DOCUMENT WAS "NOT THE SAME AS THAT GIVEN TO THE PRESIDENT ON SEPTEMBER 20." PRESIDENT ALFONSIN, THROUGH A SPOKESMAN, "DEPLORED AND REPUDIATED" THE INCLUSION OF LAGHI'S NAME ON THE LIST. "EL PERIODISTA" STOOD BY THE STORY, HOWEVER. BY THE END OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, MANY ACCEPTED THE CHURCH'S DEFENSE OF MONSIGNOR LAGHI BUT, IN THE WORDS OF A "BUENOS AIRES HERALD" EDITORIAL, FELT THE DEFENSE WAS "A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD. WHILE IT MAKES IT CLEAR THAT THERE ARE FEW DOUBTS ABOUT THE NUNCIO'S COURAGE AND DECENCY, IT ALSO IMPLIES THAT HIS ATTITUDE WAS DISTINCTLY UNUSUAL AMONG CHURCHMEN WHEN ARGENTINA WAS BEING RAVAGED BY RIGHT-WING VIOLENCE."

SECRET

[REDACTED]

5. (U) THE BISHOPS' POST-CONFERENCE DOCUMENT ADDRESSED SEVERAL OTHER KEY ISSUES OF THE DAY IN ARGENTINA. IT REAFFIRMED THE BISHOPS' AUGUST STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE BEAGLE MEDIATION EFFORT WHILE SAYING THAT CATHOLICS ARE FREE TO VOTE THEIR CONSCIENCES IN THE NOVEMBER 25 PLEBISCITE. SOCIAL JUSTICE, THE BISHOPS ARGUED, REQUIRES BOTH DEMOCRACY AND AN IMPROVEMENT IN LIVING STANDARDS. ARGENTINA'S CURRENT CRISIS, HOWEVER, MEANS THAT ECONOMIC DEMANDS HAVE TO BE TEMPERED WITH "PRUDENT" REALISM. THE GOVERNMENT'S EDUCATIONAL POLICY, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS, WAS CRITICIZED AS UNILATERAL, IDEOLOGICAL, AND NON-PLURALISTIC. IN A COMMENT ON LIBERATION THEOLOGY, THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE REJECTED BOTH "CAPITALIST MATERIALISM" AND "ATHEISTIC MARXISM".



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6. COMMENT: THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE REITERATED KNOWN ARGENTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH POSITIONS, INCLUDING ITS IMPLICIT SUPPORT OF THE BEAGLE TREATY. CHURCH POSITIONS ON POLITICALLY CONTENTIOUS ISSUES CAN STILL RAISE GOVERNMENT HACKLES. ONE DAY AFTER THE BISHOPS' STATEMENT CRITICIZING GOA EDUCATIONAL POLICIES WAS RELEASED, MINISTER OF EDUCATION CARLOS ALCONADA ARAMBURU BLASTED BACK, PUBLICLY DENYING THAT HIS MINISTRY'S POLICY HAD MATERIALISTIC ROOTS OR THREATENED THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE EDUCATION. ARAMBURU'S QUICK REACTION SUGGESTS THAT THE SHORT-TERM LEGACY OF THE BISHOPS' MEETING MAY BE SOMEWHAT GREATER UNEASE IN RELATIONS BETWEEN A GOVERNMENT INCREASINGLY SENSITIVE TO CRITICISM AND A CHURCH UNHAPPY WITH SOME ASPECTS OF ARGENTINA'S YOUNG DEMOCRACY.

UNCLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED

8

7. THE MORAL AUTHORITY BEHIND CHURCH PRONOUNCEMENTS MAY HAVE SUFFERED ANOTHER BLOW WITH PUBLICATION OF THE "PERIODISTA" LIST LINKING CHURCH FIGURES TO HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES. THE "PERIODISTA" LIST REPORTEDLY CONVINCED SOME RELIGIOUS LEADERS THAT THERE IS AN ORGANIZED CAMPAIGN BEHIND ATTACKS ON THE CHURCH. THESE CHURCH LEADERS APPARENTLY FEEL THE LEFT IS ATTEMPTING TO UNSETTLE CHURCH RELATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC AND THE ALFONSIN REGIME. SOME OBSERVERS EARLIER CRITICIZED THE RECONCILIATION THEME OF OCTOBER'S NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS, SEEING IT AS A THINLY DISGUISED CALL TO FORGET ARGENTINA'S RECENT PAST. END COMMENT. ORTIZ##

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